

4.0 Community and Social Analysis

The US Highway 53 Virginia to Eveleth Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (December 2014) is incorporated by reference and is considered part of the Final EIS. Parts of Chapter 4 from the Draft EIS are repeated here, but it has been abbreviated to focus only on the preferred alternative and what has changed since the Draft EIS.

4.1 Changes Since the Draft EIS

There have been no changes in the project setting or regulatory context or new technical studies since the Draft EIS that affect the community and social analysis. Changes in the project are described in Section 2.3.1.

Each of the following sections describes changes since the Draft EIS specific to the resource being evaluated, impacts of the preferred alternative, and mitigation measures for the preferred alternative.

4.2 Right-of-Way

4.2.1 Changes Since the Draft EIS Related to Right-of-Way

The areas of right-of-way to be acquired have been refined since the publication of the Draft EIS. As the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) enters into negotiations with property owners, minor changes in the acreage to be acquired from the identified parcels for right-of-way may continue to occur.

As the design of the preferred alternative has been refined, the following additional parcels have been identified as needing to be acquired:

- One total parcel acquisition by the 2nd Avenue interchange (Parcel 15; relocation required)
- One partial parcel acquisition (surface rights) near Midway (Parcel 206; no relocation required)
- Total acquisition of Parcel 27 for the snow storage area located approximately 0.8 miles northeast of the road alignment on the west side of Landfill Road (Parcel 27)
- Partial acquisition of a parcel owned by the St. Louis and Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority (SLLCRRA) (Parcel 20) that lies within the existing Landfill Road right-of-way

One parcel, Parcel 14, was identified in the Draft EIS as a total acquisition without a relocation. This parcel will require a relocation. Two commercial parcels identified in the Draft EIS as partial and total acquisitions (Parcels 24 and 207, respectively) will no longer be impacted by the preferred alternative.

The following additional parcels will have permanent easements obtained for project use (see [Table 4.2-2](#)). A permanent easement is an agreement giving a designated party other than the landowner the right to use the property for a specific purpose in perpetuity.

- The two staging areas and associated access road on the west side of the Rouchleau Pit
- The staging area on the south side of the Rouchleau Pit (if used, this easement would be obtained by the contractor and, therefore, is not included in [Table 4.2-2](#))

[Table 4.2-2](#) also lists a number of temporary easements that will be obtained for construction.

The proposed Mesabi Trail connection is located within a parcel owned by SLLCRRA and will remain under its ownership for the new trail segment.

These additional areas of acquisition or easement are shown in [Figure 4.2-1](#).

4.2.2 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

4.2.2.1 Property Impacts (Surface)

The preferred alternative will acquire 203 acres for right-of-way and setbacks, plus an additional six acres in temporary easements, requiring five total parcel acquisitions and three commercial relocations as shown in **Tables 4.2-1 and 4.2-2**. Permanent parcel impacts are shown in **Figure 4.2-2**. Included in the total impact is 44.6 acres of right-of-way in School Trust lands (Parcel 18). This includes approximately 5.7 acres of Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) lands within the Iron Range Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area (OHVRA) (see Section 4.4 for more details on the impact to the OHVRA).

Table 4.2-1. Summary of Acquisitions and Permanent Easements

| EIS Document Parcel ID | Parcel Number/ Multiple Parcel Identifier ^A | Land Use Classification | Parcel Size (acres) | Acres Impacted | Access Impacts | Anticipated Parcel Acquisition |
|------------------------|--|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------------------|
| 9 | City of Virginia Department of Public Utilities | City | 1.55 | 0.15 | No | Partial |
| 12 | State of Minnesota | State | 172.85 | 1.72 | No | Partial |
| 14 | 090-0180-00846 | Commercial | 0.61 | 0.61 | Yes | Total; relocation required |
| 15 | 090-0180-00848 | Commercial | 1.21 | 1.21 | Yes | Total; relocation required |
| 16 | 090-0180-00844 | Commercial | 0.91 | 0.91 | Yes | Total; relocation required |
| 17 | RGGS | Industrial | 1,145.09 | 87.23 | Yes | Partial |
| 18 | State of Minnesota School Trust | State | 338.59 | 44.58 | No | Partial |
| 19 | St. Louis County | County | 24.50 | 2.41 | No | Partial |
| 20 | SLLCRRRA | County | 9.98 | 1.83 | No | Partial |
| 23 | 090-0180-01570 | Commercial | 25.71 | 1.45 | No | Partial |
| 26 | 090-7030-02350 | Commercial | 5.66 | 5.66 | No | Total |
| 27 | RGGS | Industrial | 42.12 | 42.12 | No | Total |
| 206 | Penobscot Iron Ore | Industrial | 46.60 | 13.2 | No | Partial |
| TOTAL | | | | 203.08 | | |

^A Source: St. Louis County Parcel ID numbers

Table 4.2-2. Summary of Temporary Easements

| EIS Document Parcel ID | Parcel Number/ Multiple Parcel Identifier ^A | Land Use Classification | Parcel Size (acres) | Acres Impacted | Easement Type ^B |
|------------------------|--|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| 19 | St. Louis County | County | 24.50 | 0.21 | Temporary |
| 20 | SLLCRRRA | County | 9.98 | 5.85 | Temporary |
| 23 | 090-0180-01570 | Commercial | 25.71 | 0.13 | Temporary |
| 23A | 090-0180-01570 | Commercial | 0.76 | 0.21 | Temporary |
| TOTAL | | | | 6.40 | |

^A Source: St. Louis County Parcel ID numbers

^B Temporary easements expire on December 1, 2022

4.2.2.2 Mineral Rights Impacts

MnDOT is in the process of negotiating acquisition of surface and mineral (ferrous) rights for the right-of-way needed to preserve the roadway in perpetuity (i.e., mining interests will not be able to force MnDOT to move the new roadway). These negotiations are being informed by the in-progress studies (estimates of in-situ non-ferrous and ferrous resources) noted in the Draft EIS.

The property to be acquired for most of the new road right-of-way will be from edge of shoulder to edge of shoulder of the new roadway, plus 100 feet beyond each shoulder. Property adjacent to the shoulders and back 100 feet on each side provides a minimum mining setback distance from the road and an area for slopes, utilities, noise walls, ditches, ponds, and signage. Wider mining setbacks may be required at the sides of the road adjacent to future active mining. Around the bridge, the permanent easement will extend a maximum of 580 feet on either side of the centerline to account for seismic activity and protect the integrity of the structure (based on a minimum bridge setback and pier stability analysis). These distances are dependent on the final design of the road and will be included in the negotiation process with each landowner.

The preferred alternative alignment has been modified slightly in the area of the Straight Option to avoid the mine's permit to mine boundary, thus minimizing the setback impact to the mine in this area. The preliminary design has also aligned the bridge such that the impact to the permit to mine boundary near 2nd Avenue has been minimized to the extent practicable. As a result, the impact to future mine operation has been further minimized from what was described in the Draft EIS.

4.2.3 Mitigation

Relocations will be conducted in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (Uniform Act) and its amendments.

Two booklets entitled *Relocation: Your Rights and Benefits* and the *Guidebook for Property Owners* have been produced by MnDOT to provide information to property owners and persons to be displaced on their rights and benefits under the Uniform Act, including the Relocation Assistance Program. These documents are available from the MnDOT Office of Land Management.

The right-of-way acquired for the project will be a permanent solution commensurate with the transportation investment. Mineral rights will be acquired for lands within the Biwabik Iron Formation to preserve the roadway in perpetuity, and all easements within the formation will place all relocation responsibilities on the owner, not MnDOT.

If a contractor chooses to pursue temporary easements for staging areas not identified in this Final EIS, standard erosion control and site management best management practices (BMPs) will also apply to those areas.

4.3 Economic and Business

4.3.1 Changes Since the Draft EIS Related to Economic and Business

There have been no changes since the Draft EIS that affect the economic and business analysis that was conducted. The changes in the project definition that have occurred since the Draft EIS have been considered and the following conclusions have been drawn:

- The total acquisition of two additional parcels (Parcels 15 and 27) will not change the local economy, especially given that MnDOT will work to relocate the businesses within Virginia
- The relocation of the business on Parcel 14 will not change the local economy, especially given that MnDOT will work to relocate this business within Virginia
- The location of staging areas are temporary during construction and will not affect businesses
- The acquisition of surface rights from Parcel 206, which is already in roadway use, does not change

its current function

- The Mesabi Trail connection maintains a recreational connection between Gilbert and Virginia and will benefit downtown businesses
- The closure of the median break at Cuyuna Drive may affect access to businesses along US 53. However, an alternate access will be constructed at Vermillion Drive for southbound traffic to access the businesses in the Midway area.

4.3.2 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

4.3.2.1 Areawide Economic Impacts

The preferred alternative will have no measurable economic impact as a result of changes in travel times as compared to the existing condition. From an economic standpoint, the time differences are not substantial enough to change behavior. Road closures for blasting will occur at a frequency similar to the existing condition.

There are a variety of property types, including commercial, industrial, and residential, in the area around the 2nd Avenue interchange, and this location provides an important connection to the east side of Virginia. The new at-grade access will offer full access to 2nd Avenue from both directions versus the current partial access. This added accessibility will be beneficial to the properties at the south end of 2nd Avenue and elsewhere in Virginia.

4.3.2.2 Mine Operation Impacts

The preferred alternative presents a conflict with future access to ferrous resources, as it skirts the north and south edges of the permit to mine boundary, resulting in potential mining setbacks from the new road alignment. However, it is outside of the existing UTAC permit to mine boundary. The preferred alternative also has potential to present a conflict with non-ferrous metallic resource exploration and mining of resources such as gold. Vermillion Gold, Inc. has a lease with the State of Minnesota to explore for, mine, and remove non-ferrous metallic resources near the alignment on School Trust land. The potential for a non-ferrous metallic resources mining business, and its configuration (open or underground mining), has not been identified; however, the potential for mineral resource recovery conflicts with the preferred alternative is recognized. MnDOT has evaluated the potential quantity and quality of ferrous and non-ferrous metallic resources within the path of the preferred alternative for property negotiation purposes. The results of this analysis can be made public after negotiations and the acquisition are complete.

The preferred alternative is located outside the northeastern edge of the existing permit to mine boundary. Based on the location of the alignment relative to future mining activities and UTAC's business risk assessment, the preferred alternative is not expected to result in a business risk to the existing mine operations due to the applicability of ambient air quality regulations.

4.3.3 Mitigation

The preferred alternative does not avoid the future potential conflict with known ferrous resources or non-ferrous mineral reserves owned by the State of Minnesota School Trust and by private interests. MnDOT has conducted a series of borings along this alignment to estimate the amount and quality of ferrous resources that are present along Landfill Road. These borings have confirmed that ferrous resources are at least 200 to 400 feet west of Landfill Road, which indicates that most of the ferrous resources will remain accessible with this alternative. Mining beyond the current permit to mine limits to the north cannot be predicted; none of the nearby mine owners or operators have this area identified in their current mining plans, and, therefore, this area is not likely to be mined for a number of decades unless a substantial shift occurs in market demand.

4.4 Public Park, Recreational, Wildlife Management, and Section 4(f)/6(f) Lands

4.4.1 Changes Since the Draft EIS Related to Public Park, Recreational, Wildlife Management, and Section 4(f)/6(f) Lands

4.4.1.1 Recreational Lands

All but one of the additional areas added to the project are located outside of recreational lands. These areas include the staging areas, snow storage area, and Parcels 15 and 206. Therefore, these areas do not impact parkland resources.

The other area added to the project since the Draft EIS, the Mesabi Trail connection, is bordered by the OHVRA but is not part of the OHVRA. It has been confirmed that SLLCRRA owns the surface rights to this parcel, which is an old railroad corridor (see [Appendix A](#) for certificate of title). The DNR owns the mineral rights under the SLLCRRA parcel.

Since the Draft EIS was published, there has been further coordination between MnDOT, DNR, and SLLCRRA regarding the future Mesabi Trail alignment and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and snowmobile use of the trail. MnDOT will grant a permit along the eastern edge of the new alignment (between the new Landfill Road access and the trail on the west side of the Rouchleau Pit) to accommodate the realigned Mesabi Trail (to be reconstructed as part of the project but funded by state bonds through SLLCRRA). The trail on the bridge will be a 14-foot wide shared use trail for pedestrians and snowmobiles. The design will not preclude ATV use in the future. The Mesabi Trail connection leading to/from the bridge will be 24 feet wide, with an eight foot paved surface for pedestrians and bicycles, and a 14 foot unpaved surface for snowmobiles. See [Figure 4.4-1](#) for a typical cross section of the road with the trail.

This combined road/trail section will be constructed (trail funded by state bonds through SLLCRRA) on the new alignment between Landfill Road and the west end of the bridge. To complete the connection to the Mesabi Trail to the east, a solution outside the new road right-of-way was needed in order to not increase Section 4(f) impacts to the OHVRA (see Section 4.4.2.2 for a description of Section 4(f)). The new road alignment between MN 135 and the new Landfill Road access is severely constrained by the OHVRA boundary, existing drainageways, mineable land, and elevations. SLLCRRA identified an old railroad corridor under its ownership that crosses through the OHVRA and could be used to make a connection between the Landfill Road end of the trail accommodated on US 53 and the existing trail within the OHVRA, a distance of approximately 2,100 feet. SLLCRRA has surface rights to the rail corridor and is willing to realign the trail to this location. The trail segment will be constructed by MnDOT. This land provides a better connection to the trail without additional OHVRA impacts and has few trees within its 100-foot width. A portion of the land has an overhead power line that runs along its edge. Two box culverts are also planned to be constructed by MnDOT as part of this project to provide grade separation for the Mesabi Trail crossing at MN 135 and at Landfill Road.

This Mesabi Trail connection will maintain access between Gilbert and Virginia for snowmobiles but will not connect to Eveleth. MnDOT continues to cooperatively work with SLLCRRA and the DNR as they work to define alternate snowmobile connections to Eveleth. Connections to Eveleth would be constructed by SLLCRRA.

4.4.1.2 Section 4(f) Resources

The OHVRA is the only Section 4(f) resource impacted by the proposed project. There has been a slight increase to the OHVRA impact as a result of refinement of the right-of-way and setback needed in this area. The OHVRA impact is 5.7 acres for the preferred alternative, compared to the 4.3 acre and 5.1 acre impact identified for Alternatives E-2 and E-1A, respectively, in the Draft EIS.

4.4.2 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

The preferred alternative will impact the existing Mesabi Trail, the Trail Hawks Snowmobile Club Trail Spur, and the OHVRA (see [Figure 4.4-2](#)).

4.4.2.1 Recreational Lands

The preferred alternative will cross over the existing Mesabi Trail (both on School Trust land and on private land) and the existing Trail Hawks Snowmobile Club Trail Spur. However, these trails will both be realigned as described in Section 4.4.1.1 (see [Figure 4.4-2](#)).

4.4.2.2 Section 4(f) Resources

The OHVRA has been determined to be a Section 4(f) resource under the 1966 Department of Transportation (DOT) Act (49 USC 303, 23 USC 138).¹ None of the recreational resources impacted by the project have received Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LAWCON) funds and, therefore, are not subject to provisions of Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act.

Impacts to the OHVRA, the only impacted Section 4(f) resource, will total 5.7 acres on the westernmost edge of the designated public use area (see [Figure 4.4-3](#)).

Table 4.4-1 summarizes the potential impacts of the preferred alternative to parkland resources.

Table 4.4-1. Impacts of the Preferred Alternative to Public Park, Recreation, and Trail Resources

| Resource | Impacts of the Preferred Alternative |
|--|---|
| Mesabi Trail on Public Land | Crosses the existing trail alignment near MN 135 and Landfill Road |
| Mesabi Trail on Private Land | Crosses the existing trail alignment on west side of the Rouchleau Pit |
| Trail Hawks Snowmobile Club Trail Spur | No change to trail spur; 2nd Avenue interchange bridges removed over trail |
| OHVRA – Virginia Site (east of Landfill Road) ^A | Strip take associated with right-of-way acquisition along Landfill Road (5.7 acres); negligible impact to OHVRA activities, features, or attributes |

^A Determined to be a Section 4(f) resource

4.4.3 Mitigation

4.4.3.1 Recreational Lands

MnDOT will provide a trail permit along east side of a portion of the road for the Mesabi Trail and snowmobile use (funded by state bonds through SLLCRRRA). As the Mesabi Trail and Trail Hawks Snowmobile Club Trail Spur will be realigned and reconnected, as described above, no mitigation for the project's impacts to these existing trails is required.

While impacts to snowmobile trail connections to Eveleth would result from mining expansion (not MnDOT's project) and therefore no mitigation is required, MnDOT continues to work with SLLCRRRA and others to find alternate snowmobile trail connections to Eveleth.

4.4.3.2 Section 4(f) Resources

For the Section 4(f) impact to the OHVRA, FHWA sent notice of its intent to make a de minimis determination regarding this project to the DNR in a letter dated January 28, 2014. The DNR concurred with the proposed de minimis determination in a letter dated February 5, 2014, based on proposed construction limits. Three comments were received on FHWA's intent to make a de minimis determination

¹ In January 1983, as part of an overall reorganization of the DOT Act, Section 4(f) was amended and codified in 49 USC Section 303. However, the regulation is more commonly known as "Section 4(f)."

during the public comment period on the Draft EIS; all agreed with FHWA's intent. The final determination by FHWA is included in the Record of Decision.

4.5 Cultural Resources

4.5.1 Changes Since the Draft EIS Related to Cultural Resources

Since the publication of the Draft EIS, a snow storage area and Mesabi Trail connection outside of the cultural resources study area have been added as part of the preferred alternative. The other staging areas that have been identified were covered by the previous cultural resources analysis, and no resources were identified in those areas. The MnDOT Cultural Resources Unit (CRU) made a determination that no historic properties will be affected by the snow storage area or the Mesabi Trail connection, and the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred (see correspondence in [Appendix C](#)).

A summary of the cultural resources analysis conducted in the Draft EIS is summarized below with the addition of the findings regarding the snow storage and Mesabi Trail connection areas.

4.5.2 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

The cultural resources survey, evaluation, and effects analysis was conducted in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended) and its implementing regulations, 36 CFR 800. This act requires that impacts to historic properties, defined as those listed in, eligible for listing, or potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), be considered before implementation of a federal undertaking. MnDOT expects to obtain federal funds for the project. Therefore, it is considered a federal undertaking and must comply with the act and its regulations.

The Area of Potential Effect (APE) for archaeological resources was determined by the MnDOT Cultural Resources Unit (CRU), with concurrence from SHPO, to include the area extending 200 feet on either side of the Alternative E-2 centerline. One historic site was deemed eligible for the NRHP, the South 5th Avenue West Boulevard site. No other eligible architectural resources or archaeological sites were identified within the APE.

The preferred alternative will not be visible or cause other direct or indirect effects upon the South 5th Avenue West Boulevard site. MnDOT CRU made a determination of no historic properties affected for Alternative E-2, and SHPO concurred. There will also be no Section 4(f) impact to historic resources due to the preferred alternative.

4.5.3 Mitigation

The preferred alternative will have no impacts to NRHP-eligible resources. Therefore, mitigation measures will not be necessary.

4.6 Land Use

4.6.1 Changes Since the Draft EIS Related to Land Use

There have been no changes since the Draft EIS that affect the land use analysis that was conducted. The changes in the project definition that have occurred since the Draft EIS (described in Section 2.3.1) have been considered, and the following conclusions have been drawn:

- The total acquisition and relocation of Parcels 14 and 15 will change the parcel land use from commercial to right-of-way
- The location of staging areas are temporary during construction and will not affect long term land use

- The acquisition of surface rights from Parcel 206, which is already in roadway use, does not change its current use
- The Mesabi Trail connection maintains a recreational connection to Virginia and is consistent with the intended use of the parcel
- The closure of the median break at Cuyuna Drive may affect access to businesses along US 53. However, an alternate access will be constructed at Vermillion Drive for southbound traffic to access the businesses in the Midway area and, therefore, land use is not expected to change.

Sections 4.6.2 and 4.6.3 summarize the information reported in the Draft EIS for the preferred alternative.

4.6.2 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

The preferred alternative will introduce a new transportation corridor in the area near the existing US 53/MN 135 interchange and through the Rouchleau Pit. In the area northeast of the US 53/MN 135 interchange, the land uses surrounding the alignment and existing Landfill Road will not change as this land is owned by the State of Minnesota, is part of the OHVRA, and under management by the DNR. Additionally, the presence of the Rouchleau Pit and surrounding mineral resources anticipated to be mined in the future generally limit development potential around this portion of the alignment. The area west of the Rouchleau Pit and east of 2nd Avenue will be subject to right-of-way acquisition necessary to accommodate the new highway. As described in Section 4.2, four total parcel acquisitions are anticipated in this area. The potential for other land use changes in the 2nd Avenue area is limited, as access will be retained with limited impacts to existing conditions for surrounding properties.

The preferred alternative is not expected to cause noticeable change in land use within the study area. It is not anticipated to lead to the development of any large scale commercial, industrial, residential, or other development. The project is consistent with local and/or regional comprehensive plans.

4.6.3 Mitigation

No mitigation is necessary.

4.7 Environmental Justice

4.7.1 Changes Since the Draft EIS Related to Environmental Justice

There have been no changes since the Draft EIS that affect the environmental justice analysis that was conducted. The added staging areas, snow storage site, and the Mesabi Trail connection are not located near any known low income or minority populations.

4.7.2 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Low-income and minority populations were not identified along the preferred alternative corridor. The preferred alternative is not anticipated to have a direct or indirect impact on environmental justice populations.

4.7.3 Mitigation

There will be no disproportionately high or adverse effects to environmental justice populations due to this project; therefore, no mitigation is required.

4.8 Social, Neighborhood, and Community Facility Impacts

4.8.1 Changes Since the Draft EIS Related to Social, Neighborhood, and Community Facility Impacts

There have been no changes since the Draft EIS that affect the analysis that was conducted to determine social, neighborhood, and community facility impacts. The added staging areas and snow storage site will not impact any community facilities or connections between communities. The added Mesabi Trail connection will benefit community connectivity by restoring the Mesabi trail section that will be severed by future mining activities. The median closure at Cuyuna Drive in the Midway area has the potential to reduce accessibility to this part of the city; however, an alternate median access will be constructed at Vermillion Drive that will serve the same access function in a safer location.

Sections 4.8.2 and 4.8.3 summarize the information reported in the Draft EIS for the preferred alternative.

4.8.2 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

4.8.2.1 Virginia

The preferred alternative will provide a connection similar to the existing one between the downtown/Ridgewood areas and the Midway neighborhood. The intersection at 2nd Avenue will be modified to an at-grade, full access intersection. The new median break at Vermillion Drive will maintain access to the Midway area and provide a safer access location. ISD 706 bus routes will be modified to accommodate the different connection point between the two sections of US 53, but, overall, no major connectivity issues are anticipated. The change in fire and police response to the Midway section of the city will be minimal due to the location of the preferred alternative in relation to the existing US 53 alignment. The full access improvements at 2nd Avenue and the location of the northern connection to existing US 53 will maintain access for emergency response to transport from the Midway neighborhood to Essentia Health-Virginia.

4.8.2.2 Eveleth

The preferred alternative will not change the direct connection between Eveleth and Virginia's downtown/Ridgewood areas. It will not impact the bus movements for ISD 2154 between Eveleth, Gilbert, and Leonidas. The full access improvements at 2nd Avenue and the location of the connection to existing US 53 will maintain access for emergency response to transport from Eveleth to Essentia Health-Virginia.

4.8.2.3 Gilbert

The preferred alternative will not change the direct connection between Gilbert and Virginia's downtown/Ridgewood areas. It will not impact the bus movements for ISD 2154 between Eveleth, Gilbert, and Leonidas. The full access improvements at 2nd Avenue and the location of the connection to existing US 53 will provide better access for emergency response to transport from Gilbert to Essentia Health-Virginia.

4.8.2.4 Mountain Iron

The preferred alternative will not impact the connection between the US 169 area of Mountain Iron and the Midway neighborhood of Virginia. These alternatives will not impact the bus movements for ISD 712 between Mountain Iron, Buhl, and Kinney. These alternatives will not impact the movement of fire and emergency response between Virginia and Mountain Iron, as the fire and emergency response stations are located within the downtown area of Virginia.

4.8.2.5 Leonidas

The preferred alternative will not remove the direct connection between Leonidas and Virginia's downtown area. It will not impact the bus movements for ISD 2154 between Eveleth, Gilbert, and

Leonidas. The change at 2nd Avenue and the location of connecting the existing US 53 in the downtown area will provide better access for emergency response to transport from Leonidas to Essentia Health-Virginia.

4.8.3 Mitigation

No mitigation is required.

4.9 Visual and Aesthetic Impacts

4.9.1 Changes Since the Draft EIS Related to Visual and Aesthetic Impacts

Since the publication of the Draft EIS, a Visual Quality Review Committee was formed. There are 10 committee members, representing the Laurentian Chamber of Commerce, the City of Virginia, the Iron Range Resources Rehabilitation Board (IRRRB), Cliffs Natural Resources, local businesses, and residents of Virginia, and the committee is led by MnDOT staff. The committee provided input on the visual quality aspects of the project in the areas of the US 53/MN 135 interchange, the bridge crossing the Rouchleau Pit, and the 2nd Avenue intersection. The committee met five times between January and June 2015 and produced visual quality guidelines to be used during final design.

The changes in the project definition that have occurred since the Draft EIS (described in Section 2.3.1) have been considered, and the following conclusions have been drawn:

- The total acquisition and relocation of Parcels 14 and 15 will change the views from the 2nd Avenue neighborhood with the removal of three commercial buildings
- The location of staging areas are temporary during construction and will not affect long term views
- The acquisition of surface rights from Parcel 206, which is already in roadway use, does not change views in this area
- The Mesabi Trail connection maintains a recreational connection to Virginia and is consistent with the intended use of the parcel. Views from this new trail segment will be similar to the removed trail segment with views of trees and open space.
- The closure of the median break at Cuyuna Drive and the new median break at Vermillion Drive will be a changed condition but will not substantially change the view to/from the roadway. The change in traffic pattern may result in observation of more traffic on Mesabi Drive between Cuyuna and Vermillion Drives.

Sections 4.9.2 and 4.9.3 summarize the information reported in the Draft EIS for the preferred alternative.

4.9.2 Impacts of the Preferred Alternative

Visual impacts are the perceived changes in visual quality of an existing scene. The discussion of visual impacts is structured according to three environments: natural environment, cultural environment, and highway environment. MnDOT guidance for assessing the degree of visual impact provides three criteria that may be used:

- *Value* of a visual impact (beneficial, adverse, or unchanged)
- *Scale* of impact (minor or major)
- *Extent* of impact (localized or widespread)

4.9.2.1 Natural Environment

Crossing the Rouchleau pit will represent a minor change to that existing scene, as there are few views of the scene available currently. Open lands to the east of the pit will also have views of the new highway corridor and the large bridge structure spanning the pit.

4.9.2.2 Cultural Environment

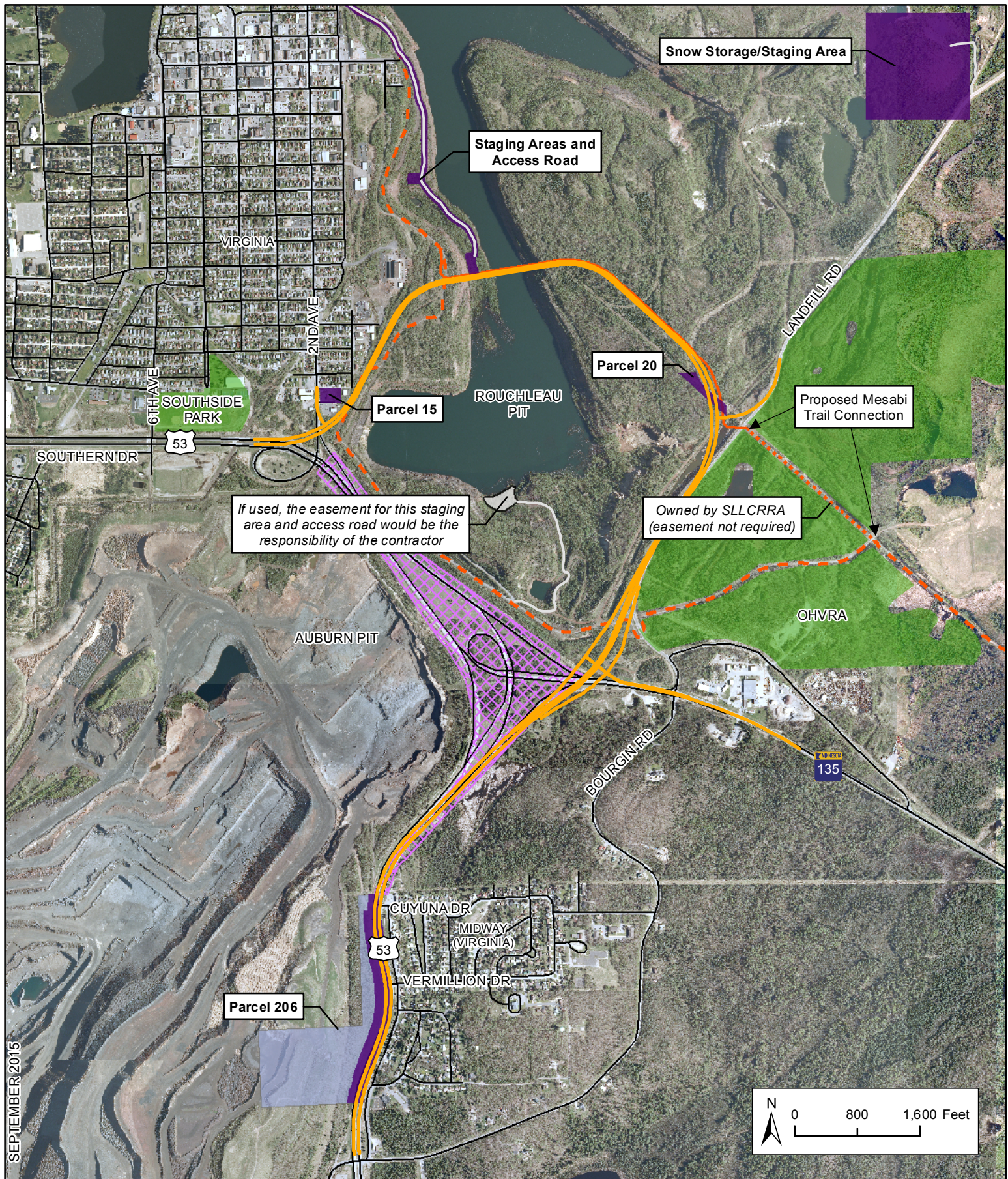
By retaining existing access location points at 2nd Avenue and MN 135, there are no impacts to views of and from the adjacent residential and commercial areas of US 53.

4.9.2.3 Highway Environment

An assumed constrained cross section, including median barriers and barriers on both sides of the roadway, for US 53 through the Rouchleau Pit will have a minor, localized impact on views of the highway environment for users of US 53. The interchange at US 53/MN 135 will result in similar pavement area as today but with a new configuration that otherwise follows a similar alignment.

4.9.3 Mitigation

No adverse visual and aesthetic impacts are anticipated as a result of the preferred alternative; therefore, no mitigation is required. The visual quality guidelines produced by the Visual Quality Review Committee will be used during the final design process.



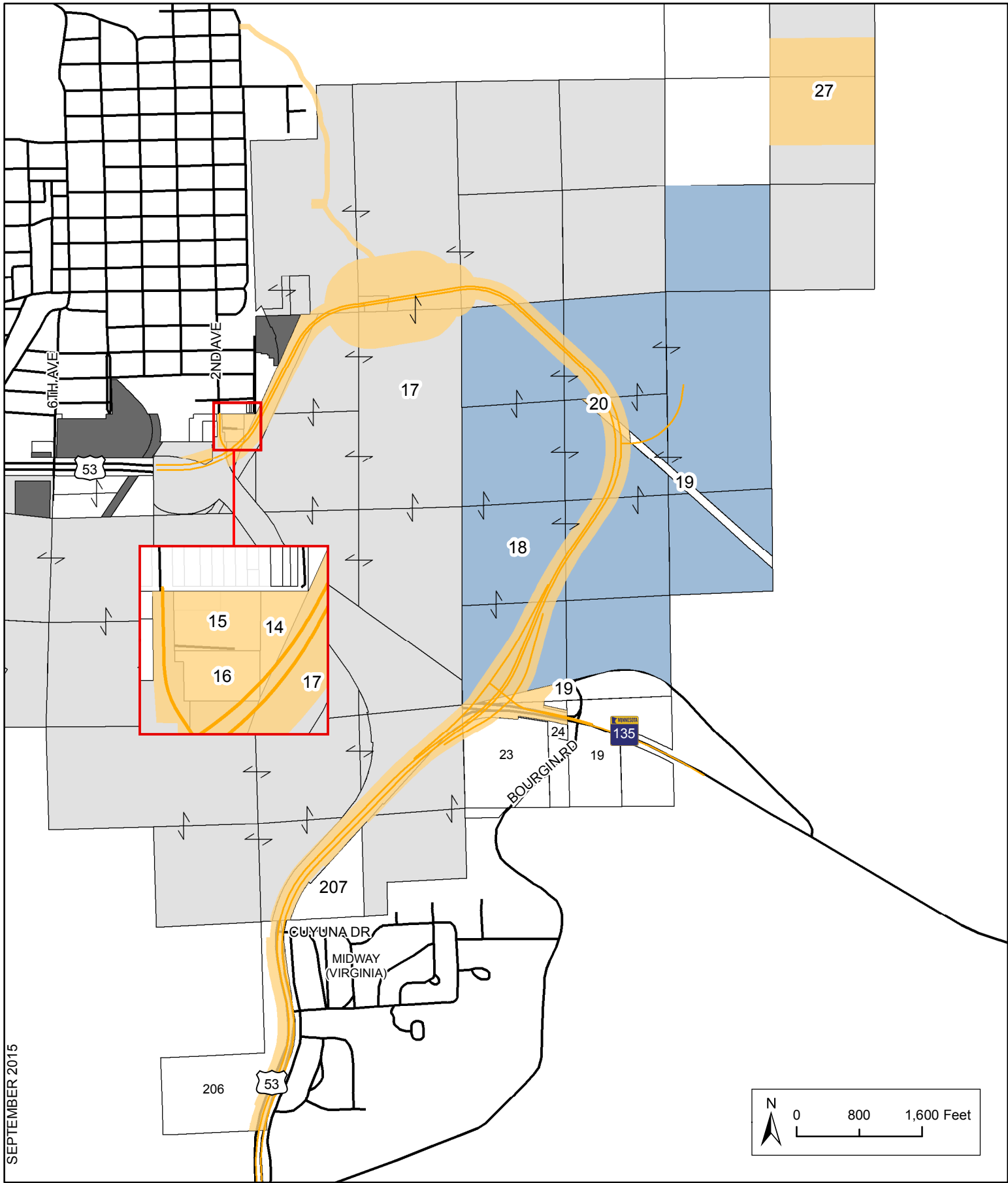
Source: USGS
Aerial 2009

Legend

- Preferred Alternative
- Additional Right-of-Way Acquisition
- Existing Access Roads
- Realigned Mesabi Trail
- - - Proposed Mesabi Trail Connection
- - - Existing Mesabi Trail
- Public Recreation Land
- Existing US 53 Easement
- - - Agreement Area



Figure 4.2-1
Additional Areas of Acquisition
US Highway 53 Virginia to Eveleth
Final Environmental Impact Statement



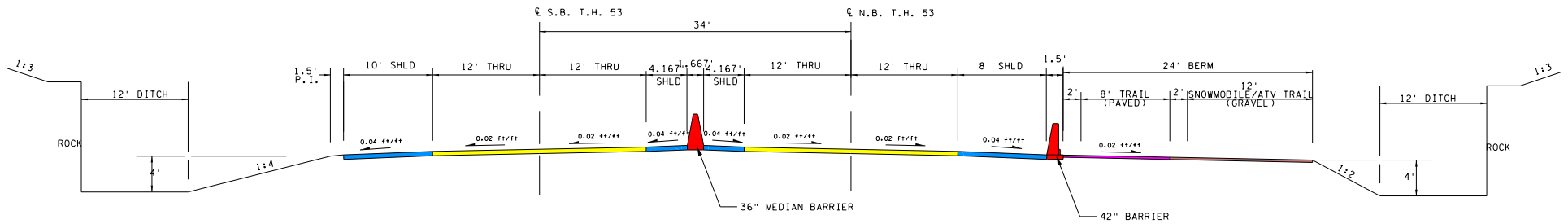
Legend

- Parcel Boundaries
- City of Virginia (Parcels 4 & 8)
- RGGS (Parcels 17 & 27)
- State of Minnesota School Trust (Parcel 18)
- Preferred Alternative
- Permanent Parcel Impacts
- Connected Parcels

Figure 4.2-2
Permanent Parcel Impacts
 US Highway 53 Virginia to Eveleth
 Final Environmental Impact Statement



Proposed Constrained Cross Section with Trail



Proposed Constrained Cross Section on Bridge

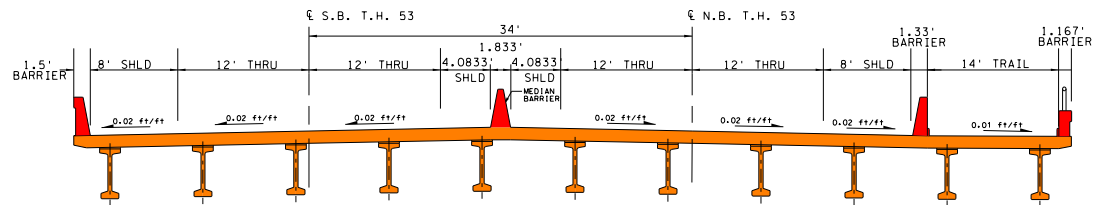
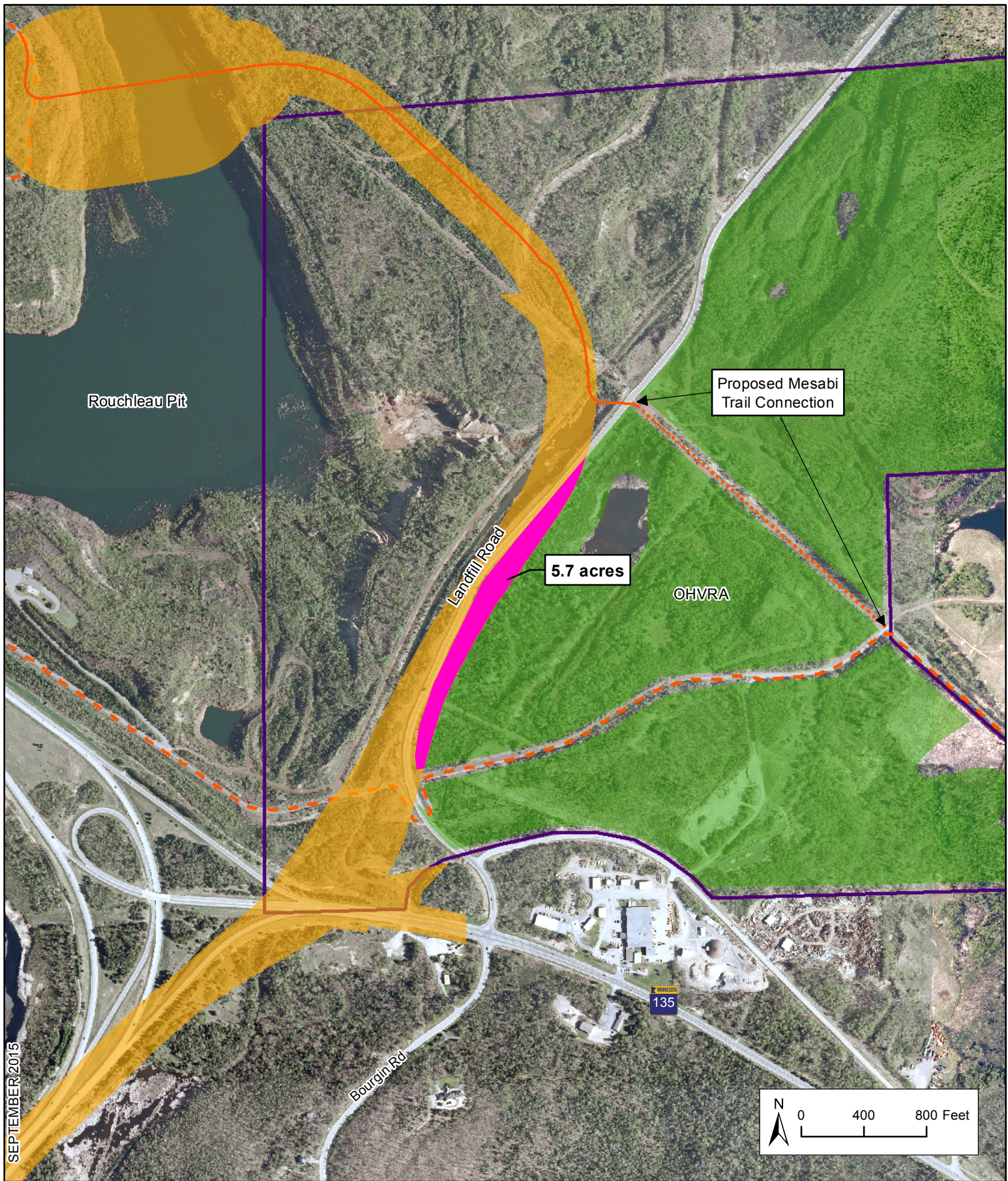


Figure 4.4-1
Proposed Cross Sections with Trail
 US Highway 53 Virginia to Eveleth
 Final Environmental Impact Statement



Figure 4.4-2
Parks, Trails, and Section 4(f)
Resources
 US Highway 53 Virginia to Eveleth
 Final Environmental Impact Statement



Legend

- | | |
|---|--|
| OHVRA Impact | Existing Mesabi Trail |
| Proposed Right-of-Way Limits | Existing School Trust Land |
| Realigned Mesabi Trail | OHVRA |
| Proposed Mesabi Trail Connection | |

Figure 4.4-3
OHVRA Impact
US Highway 53 Virginia to Eveleth
Draft Environmental Impact Statement